

AFI

APOSTOLIC CONSULTATION

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INTRODUCTION

Giovanni Traettino

Beloved brothers,

We come to this appointment exactly twenty years after that at Grenoble in 1999. That meeting was held on the initiative of the late lamented Pastor Pierre Truschel, a far-sighted and visionary apostolic minister who provided the opportunity for some of us – who, together with him, became the initiators of this process – to get to know one another and share our lives and ministries. In May of the following year, at Positano, we founded the *fellowship*, later to become *koinonia*, in which we are still moving forward. It was on that occasion that we defined the nature of apostolic ministry¹ and of our group² and adopted our *Mission Statement* and the guidelines that have accompanied us over the years.

As we came together, we concentrated first of all on the fundamental value of relationships ("*Life comes before ministry*"): the sort of relationships, based on the God who dwells "within us" and that are part of the nature of the church derived from its Author, that we would need to draw from Him and live out among ourselves.

We then began to explore the "charter" and mission of apostolic ministry, developing a growing understanding of its importance for both the present and the future of the church. In particular, we discussed the essential contribution of this ministry to the *revelation* of the "mystery of Christ and of the Body of Christ" and to its *construction* in the life and experience of relationships between Christians. It was clear to us that there was a great need to "set to work" on the *vacuum* – a major "breach" – caused by the solitary and sometimes merely positional – or even self-referential – behaviour of well-known apostolic ministries, contrasting with the pluralistic ("collegial"), open, humble and relational exercise of the apostolate in the New Testament.

We have come a long way in these twenty years. Deep relationships have been formed. Highly meaningful conclusions have been reached, as can be seen on our web site. Some of these contributions deserve to be more widely known. We have an awareness of having been brought together by a sovereign work of God... We have stayed together... we have gone forward... Our eyes are set on God's ultimate purpose. We are here to go further.

The foundation of our shared experience – because it lies at the heart of our calling – and underpinning all our relationships, our activities and discussions, is... Christ! The mystery of Christ and of the Body of Christ, explored in different directions, is fundamental. A passionate

¹ The nature of apostleship: 1. Revelation of the mystery of Christ and of the Body of Christ; 2. First translocal creative ministry with authority to a network of churches; /ministries. 3. Recognition from other apostles.

² Who we are: A group of apostles in relationship with common values and vision for reconciliation and edification of the Body of Christ.

seeking after Christ, a love for the church – the one and only church, His bride – in our day-to-day and inevitably partial experience, amidst the contradictions and challenges of all that we build or experience.

A turning-point in history

In our most recent sessions there has been a greater emphasis – though it was never absent from our thinking – on the theme of the future: the future of the Kingdom in relation to the “burden” of the Church; the future of the church in relation to the “burden” of apostolic ministry; and consequently, also in relation to the direction and future of this *koinonia*.

Someone has remarked that the times we are living through are more and more like the early centuries of the church, a time of decadence and the collapse of the Roman Empire; a revolution in mentality and morals, a historic turning-point. It is suggested that secularisation and globalisation have given rise to a process described as “the end of history”, a process of “destructuring” or “desertification”, which is corroding and attacking Christianity - both from outside and from within - in lethal fashion; a process advancing “from the bark to the vital core”, gradually but inexorably demolishing all legal and social protections and exposing all that has been built over the centuries, the models and paradigms (mentality) passed down to us and rooted in our cultures from past times and seasons, from earlier civilisations. To “force us” (the naked hand of God?) - if Christianity is to survive - to rethink it, re-imagine it³, starting from the *lymph* of the “deep” reasons (the roots) of “being Christian”, and for being Christians.

The historic churches too have gone back, ever more frequently and decidedly, to talking about “conversion” and “reformation”; about the importance of a *personal encounter* with Christ, about returning to the Christ as the foundation of foundations (“foundational ecumenism!”) and about the life of the Spirit (“spiritual ecumenism!”). In the context of a deep and undeniable crisis, we are “forced” to “denude” our faith of its trappings, re-examine practices and concepts that have been accepted for centuries, re-imagine the church of the future and revise the modes and forms of what is considered “sacred”. This is a historic crisis. The sense of disorientation is powerful. Perhaps I am mistaken: the “monuments” will remain, but I believe that in the long term only the various forms of “Christianity of the lymph”, those that are authentic and connected to the roots, will survive. There is an interesting “prophecy” given by Joseph Ratzinger in a speech made as long ago as 1969:

“From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge, a Church will have lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in times of prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so she will lose many of her social privileges. She will begin again with small groups and movements and a minority who will make faith central to their experience. She will be a more spiritual Church, one that will not claim a political mandate, flirting with the Right one minute and the Left the next. She will be poor and will become the Church of the destitute. Then people will see this little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope for their own lives, the answer for which they have always been secretly searching.”

³ The title of a Christian seminar at Fribourg University, Switzerland, a few years ago.

The salt of the earth and the light of the world⁴

The theme of this Consultation is "The salt of the earth, the light of the world". This is a subject we have already grappled with in the past. This time, however, we have two particular sub-headings:

1. "The prophetic proposals of the apostolic ministry for the church in the face of the challenges of today's world" - How to face them?
2. Summing up: "Christian anthropology and the challenge of gender ideology" - How to face it?

The speakers have done a good job in preparation. We shall listen to them attentively and there will be opportunities for dialogue. Allow me, however, to make here one or two preliminary observations: What - or rather, *who* - makes us, or is able to make us, the salt of the earth and the light of the world? We all know the answer: Christ! The *mystery of Christ in us!*⁵ Our immersion in Him, our spiritual union with Him. As has been said:

"The thought of a *spiritual union with Christ* in his death and resurrection, which is at the very heart of Paul's experience and teaching, is the key here. So close is this intimacy of knowledge and experience with his Lord that he can regard his apostolic career as an inner participation in his sufferings, which has almost the character of identity."⁶

The apostolic ministry

And to continue: *What is the apostolic ministry's "prophetic proposal" for the church today? What is its possible contribution in facing the challenges that present themselves? "My dear children - the apostle insists - for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). It is clear from Scripture that the determining characteristic of apostolic ministry is laying foundation.⁷ The foundation is Christ. An apostle, before anything else, is the one who lays the foundation, the foundation that is Christ; in us and among us (the church). In truth, the secret of secrets for Christian life and work in the world is the implanting and shaping of Christ in us.⁸ It is from there, from the place where Christ truly dwells, from the inner man, from within to the outside, that God's activity in the individual and in the church, in society and in the world draws its life. The Spirit that dwells in the depths of God⁹ comes to dwell in the depths of our being, and from there wants to visit my brother and my neighbour and to transform society. Let no one think this observation is taken for granted. It is from this truth - lived out, incarnate, practised - that are derived all the possible "influences", including those directed outwards towards the world, that it is given us to exercise.*

So an apostle must pay close attention to the foundation, to lay the foundation of the mystery of Christ in the Christian and in the church. This is the bursting in of God's government in man, the "sowing" of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Perhaps some may accuse me of intimism, but it is not true! Of the need for intimacy, of a "hidden way", yes. We most urgently need to live in contact with "the depths" of God, to cultivate an authentic relationship with the

⁴ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Mt 5:13-16 NIV.

⁵ "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me." Col 1:27-29.

⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, InterVarsity Press, 1976, p.52.

⁷ "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1Cor 3:10-11.

⁸ We are a prophetic people. And the first prophecy is to "repeat", to "incarnate" Christ. The life and style of Christ. A people that "repeats" and incarnates Christ.

⁹ "These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." 1Cor 2:10.

Spirit, of intimacy with God. Yes, because that is where the source is. Otherwise we will be exposed to the risk of superficiality and moralism, close to becoming victims of volunteerism, or even legalism itself. It is from there, from Him, that come the salt, the light, the aroma, the *dunamis*, the possibility of fellowship (*koinonia*) that will cause us to reflect, shine forth, emanate the aroma of the spirit and life of Christ, our life. He is the salt that can make us salt, the light that can make us lights, the aroma that can make us a sweet-smelling aroma. Christ is the foundation of our life; Christ is the foundation of the Body of Christ.